

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 FEA-01 ERDA-05 AID-05

CEA-01 CIAE-00 CIEP-01 COME-00 DODE-00 EB-07 FPC-01

H-02 INR-07 INT-05 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 OMB-01 PM-04

USIA-06 SAM-01 OES-06 SP-02 SS-15 STR-04 TRSE-00

ACDA-07 CEQ-01 DOTE-00 EPA-01 HEW-04 HUD-01 NSF-01

OIC-02 PA-01 PRS-01 SAJ-01 LAB-04 SIL-01 /142 W

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R 010605Z NOV 76

FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9226

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMCONSUL MELBOURNE

USMISSION OECD PARIS

AMCONSUL SYDNEY

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

USMISSION IAEA VIENNA

ERDA HQ GERMANTOWN

ERDA HQ WASHINGTON

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EALR, EMIN, ENRG, AS

SUBJECT: RANGER 'FOX) URANIUM ENVIRONMENTAL INQUIRY REACTIONS

REF: (A) CANBERRA 7888, (B) CANBERRA 7843 (BOTH NOTAL)

1. QUALIFIED APPROVAL FOR URANIUM MINING AND MILLING BY
FOX REPORT HAS EVOKED PREDICTABLE RESPONSES FROM GOVERNMENT,
INDUSTRY, ENVIRONMENTALISTS, AND PUBLIC. ESSENTIALLY, FOX
REPORT DOES NOT BAN URANIUM MINING AND MILLING, EXCLUSIVE OF
NORTHERN TERRITORY WHICH IS SUBJECT OF FORTHCOMING SECOND
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REPORT, SUBJECT TO STRINGENT SAFEGUARDS AND REGULATIONS.

REPORT SUGGESTS THAT ITS FINDINGS, PARTICULARLY ISSUES RELATING TO PROLIFERATION AND SAFEGUARDS, BE SUBJECTED TO FURTHER PUBLIC AND PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE.

2. GOA OFFICIALS VIEW REPORT AS ONLY A RECOMMENDATION WITH FINDINGS SUBJECTED TO INTERDEPARTMENTAL ANALYSIS AND DEVELOPMENT OF GOA POSITION TO BE DELIVERED TO PARLIAMENT FOR ACTION. CABINET MEMBERS ARE INCLINED TO FAVOR URANIUM MINING, BUT HAVE BEEN CAREFUL NOT TO COMMENT SO AS TO PROVOKE CRITICISM FROM ANTI-NUCLEAR FORCES. CONSENSUS AMONG MANY LIBERAL-COUNTRY PARTY OFFICIALS IS THAT DEBATE HAS GONE FAR ENOUGH, WHEREAS, OPPOSITION HAS ISSUED CALL FOR INTENSIVE PUBLIC AND PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE.

3. INDUSTRY SPOKESMEN ARE GUARDEDLY OPTIMISTIC THAT MINING AND EXPORT OF URANIUM WILL PROCEED AT FUTURE DATE, BUT ARE SOMEWHAT DISGRUNTLED BY CONTINUING DELAY FOR WHAT THEY SEE AS FINAL APPROVAL FOR MINING, MILLING, AND EXPORTING URANIUM. INDUSTRY IS RELIEVED REPORT DID NOT RECOMMEND BAN ON URANIUM MINING, BUT INDUSTRY OFFICIALS REMAIN UNEASY BECAUSE FOX REPORT DID NOT HAND DOWN RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING MINING IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY, SITE OF MASSIVE URANIUM RESERVES. THE SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES OF MINING IN NORTHERN TERRITORY WILL BE DISCUSSED IN SECOND REPORT.

4. LABOR UNION CRITICISM OF URANIUM MINING CONTINUES. UNION OFFICIALS CALL FOR ADDITIONAL EXTENSIVE PUBLIC AND PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE AND IMPLORE THE GOA NOT TO ACT HASTILY. ANY RAPID GOA ACTION WILL LIKELY MEET WITH STRONG OPPOSITION FROM THE UNION RESULTING IN STRIKES AND CONTINUED TRANSPORT BANS. RAILWAY UNIONS CONTINUE THEIR BAN ON URANIUM SHIPMENTS FROM MARY KATHLEEN.

5. PREDICTABLE RESPONSES WERE FORTHCOMING FROM THE ANTI-NUCLEAR ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS. ANTI-NUCLEAR GROUPS REMAIN OPTIMISTIC THAT URANIUM WILL NOT BE MINED. CRITICISM OF REPORT FOR ITS FAILURE TO SUGGEST MINING BAN IN FACE OF NUCLEAR WEAPON PROLIFERATION THREAT AND DIFFICULTY OF MAINTAINING SAFEGUARDS ASSOCIATED WITH URANIUM MINING (BOTH SUBJECT OF EXTENSIVE ANALYSIS IN REPORT) AND TRANSPORT. LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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6. IN MANY CIRCLES, THE FOX REPORT HAS BEEN CRITICIZED FOR ITS FAILURE TO BE MORE CONCLUSIVE IN ITS FINDINGS PARTICULARLY AS IT RELATES TO APPROVAL OR DISAPPROVAL OF URANIUM MINING AND ITS RELATED ATTRIBUTES. COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION THAT FINDINGS OF THE REPORT BE SUBJECTED TO MORE DEBATE IS VIEWED BY MANY AS FRIVOLOUS BECAUSE OF THE LENGTHY DEBATE ALREADY UNDERTAKEN.

7. COMMENT: IRRESPECTIVE OF THE GOA DECISION ON URANIUM MINING, THERE WILL BE STRONG OPPOSITION TO THE POLICY DECISION. PARLIAMENT IS PUT IN THE UNENVIABLE POSITION OF MAKING THE FINAL DECISION. THERE IS SOME SPECULATION THAT CONDITIONS FOR MINING URANIUM STIPULATED IN THE FOX REPORT ARE SUCH THAT THEY ARE ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO MEET, E.G., TERMS OF ALL AUSTRALIAN URANIUM SALES ARRANGEMENTS SHOULD ENSURE THAT SUPPLIES CAN BE STOPPED OR RESTRICTED, UNILATERALLY BY GOA IF HAZARDS AND OTHER DIFFICULTIES ASSOCIATED WITH URANIUM MAKE SUCH A COURSE OF ACTION DESIRABLE.

8. GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE OFFICIALS HAVE NOT ISSUED MANY STATEMENTS SINCE THE REPORT WAS ISSUED, BUT ENTIRE NUCLEAR ISSUE IS SEETHING BENEATH THE SURFACE. EMBASSY WILL REPORT DEVELOPMENTS AS THEY OCCURE.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: URANIUM, MINING INDUSTRY, PUBLIC ATTITUDES, RANGER (FOX), GOVERNMENT REACTIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 01 NOV 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: morefirh
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976CANBER07936
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760406-0498
From: CANBERRA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19761195/aaaadeak.tel
Line Count: 132
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 CANBERRA 7888, 76 CANBERRA 7843
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: morefirh
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 12 NOV 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <12 NOV 2003 by GarlanWA>; APPROVED <06 APR 2004 by morefirh>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: RANGER (FOX) URANIUM ENVIRONMENTAL INQUIRY REACTIONS
TAGS: EALR, EMIN, ENRG, AS
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006